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ABSTRACT

The 11 items in this annotated bibliography are entries in the ERIC system concerning studies of school effectiveness and the debate surrounding how much influence schools have over student learning. Several articles included reexamine the 1966 Coleman report, and one compares a more recent Coleman report with the earlier report. A number of studies cited explore what makes exemplary schools outstanding. Influences on school effectiveness identified by these studies include school climate or norms, strong school leadership, high expectations for students, smaller classes, more experienced teachers, student motivation, quality of the home environment, academic emphasis, and teacher skills. Some articles also explore the validity of research techniques used to determine school effectiveness. (JM)

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The Best of ERIC presents annotations of ERIC literature on important topics in educational management.

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School Effectiveness

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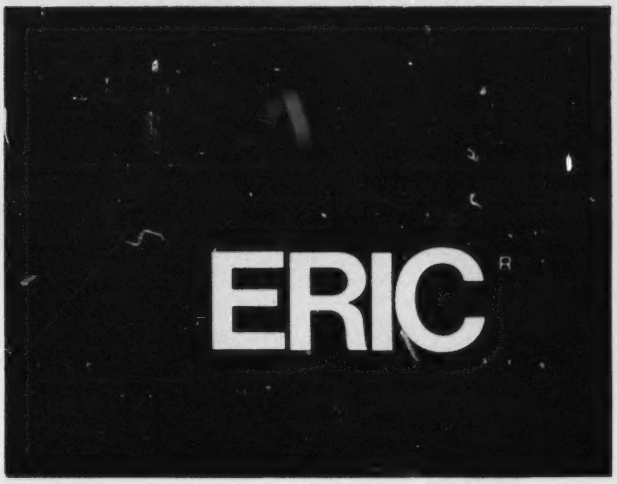

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School Effectiveness

1 **Airasian, Peter W.; Kellaghan, Thomas; and Madaus, George F.** *Concepts of School Effectiveness as Derived from Research Strategies: Differences in the Findings.* 1979. 50 pages. ED 192 456.

Studies of school effectiveness vary widely in their designs. Such methodological parameters as level of data aggregation, stratification level, strategy of data analysis, and choice of dependent and independent variables differ greatly from study to study. The methodological choices a researcher makes are important, say the authors, because "taken together, they help to define the *de facto* conceptual framework" of a study. Understanding the conceptual framework, in turn, is essential for identifying the "inherent meaning" of a study and for comparing its results to other studies.

In this paper, the authors critique the 1966 Coleman report and other school effectiveness studies, with special attention to the conceptual framework underlying each study. "Our intent is to show how different conceptualizations of school emerge from the use of different methodological parameters," they state, "and to show further how altering one or more of these parameters can alter dramatically inferences made about schooling and school effectiveness."

The conceptualization underlying the Coleman report is as follows: "The school as a whole, by virtue of its static resources and facilities, influences pupils' general cognitive outcomes as measured by commercially available standardized tests." Home background influences are considered "prior to and independent of school influences" in this conceptualization. But a later researcher reanalyzed the same data using different methods that, in effect, altered the latter part of the Coleman report's conceptualization to read: "The school's influence is not necessarily independent of pupils' home background characteristics." This study found that 35 percent of the variation in student achievement was due to school factors, as opposed to the 10 percent found by Coleman.

The authors go on to show how modifications of other methodological parameters can influence both the conceptualization of a study and the conclusions drawn from its results.

2 **Austin, Gilbert R.** "Exemplary Schools and the Search for Effectiveness." *Educational Leadership,* 37, 1 (October 1979), pp. 10-12, 14. EJ 208 050.

Until the mid-1960s, educators were certain that they could teach children of all backgrounds, given adequate resources. Doubts began to surface, however, with the publication of the 1966 Coleman report and other similar studies. These studies concluded that family background factors—and not variations in school facilities, curriculum, and staff—were the primary determinants of academic achievement.

Other researchers during this period, however, were taking a different approach to the school effectiveness question. They identified the exemplary or highly effective schools in a sample and then described the characteristics of these schools.

"The major finding of these studies," states Austin, "is that there is no one single factor that accounts for a school being classified as exceptional. These schools appear to have a critical mass of positive factors which, when put together, make the difference." Each of the factors associated with effectiveness was not found in every exceptional school, Austin points out; rather the factors "are characteristic of the group as a whole."

In the exceptional schools, the principal's leadership was "strong," meaning, for example, that the schools were "'being run' for a purpose rather than 'running' from force of habit." Principals also participated strongly in the classroom instructional program, felt they had control over the functioning of their schools, and held high expectations for both teachers and students.

All staff had "greater experience and more pertinent education." Teachers had freedom to choose teaching techniques, were more satisfied with opportunities to try new techniques, expected more children to show high achievement and display good citizenship, and were rated as warmer and more responsive. Students had more positive self-concepts and a greater "feeling of controlling their own destiny." Austin concludes that "the individual characteristics of principals, teachers, schools, neighborhoods, and home influence a pupil's achievement far more than particular instructional models."

3 **Averch, Harvey A.; Carroll, Stephen J.; Donaldson, Theodore S.; Kiesling, Herbert J.; and Pincus, John.** *How Effective Is Schooling? A Critical Review and Synthesis of Research Findings.* Santa Monica, California: The Rand Corporation, 1971. 249 pages. ED 058 495.

What is the current state of knowledge regarding the determinants of educational effectiveness? To find out, the President's Commission on School Finance asked The Rand Corporation to critically analyze the vast research literature on this topic. The result is this comprehensive report, which, the authors emphasize, is not simply a "classical survey of research listing findings without much evaluation of the results." Rather, it is a *critical* survey that analyzes each study according to both its "internal validity" and its

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credibility "in the light of accumulated knowledge."

The authors organized their analysis according to the five basic research approaches utilized by researchers. One of these approaches concentrates on the "processes" applied to students and the interactions between teachers and students. Classroom studies on process show "no consistent effect on student achievement" of different teaching approaches, class size, or instructional methods, the authors state. Laboratory studies on process suggest the importance of the sequencing and organization of learning materials and the complexity of interaction effects between students, teachers, and methods.

The authors also analyze the "input-output" approach, which assumes that a student's educational outcomes are determined by the quantities and qualities of educational resources made available by personal, family, and community characteristics; the "organizational" approach, which assumes that the history and societal demands on a school are more important than what is actually done in the school; the "evaluative" approach, which includes studies of the effects of large-scale interventions in education, such as Title I and Head Start programs; and the "experiential" approach, which is represented by the varied literature on educational reform.

The authors conclude that "research has not identified a variant of the existing system that is consistently related to students' educational outcomes." This does not mean that "nothing makes a difference, or that nothing 'works'," the authors emphasize. "Rather, we are saying that research has found nothing that consistently and unambiguously makes a difference in student outcomes."

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4 **Brookover, Wilbur B.; Schwitzer, John H.; Schneider, Jeffrey M.; Beady, Charles H.; Flood, Patricia K.; and Wisenbaker, Joseph M.** "Elementary School Social Climate and School Achievement." *American Educational Research Journal,* 15, 2 (Spring 1978), pp. 301-318. EJ 189 559.

"Some aspects of school social environment clearly make a difference in the academic achievement of schools." This is the foremost conclusion of a study of ninety-one Michigan elementary schools conducted by Brookover and his colleagues and reported in this article.

The authors use the term "school climate" to refer to aspects of the school social environment they studied. School climate, they state, "may be broadly conceived as the norms of the [school] social system." Specific school climate variables measured included student "sense of academic futility," student "perception of teacher push and teacher norms," teacher "perception of principal's expectations," and "parent concern and expectations for quality education" as perceived by the principal.

From state and school records, the researchers obtained data on socioeconomic status of students' families, racial composition of each school, and achievement scores. Questionnaires were then administered to students, teachers, and the principal of each school to measure school climate variables.

The authors found large differences between schools in student achievement. "The socio-economic and racial composition of the schools can explain a significant portion of this variance," they state. However, the climate variables can also explain a significant portion of the variance. In other words, socioeconomic and racial variables and the climate variables appear to be generally related.

There are exceptions, however. Some low-SES schools "have school climates favorable for achievement and some high SES schools have school climates that are not highly favorable for achievement." Favorable climate rather than high SES or racial composition is, the authors believe, the necessary condition for high achievement.

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5 **Edmonds, Ronald.** "Effective Schools for the Urban Poor." *Educational Leadership,* 37, 1 (October 1979), pp. 15-18, 20-24. EJ 208 051.

Social scientists and opinionmakers continue to espouse the belief that home and family background factors are the chief determinants of student achievement. But effective schools *do* exist in urban and poor areas, Edmonds argues, and their success, as several research studies show, stems from such school-controlled factors as leadership, expectation, atmosphere, and instructional emphasis. In this article, Edmonds reviews some of these studies and argues for the general thesis "that all children are eminently educable and that the behavior of the school is critical in determining the quality of that education."

A 1971 study, for example, identified and characterized four instructionally effective inner-city schools. All four schools had "strong leadership," had high expectations for all of their students, had "an orderly, relatively quiet, and pleasant atmosphere," and "strongly emphasized pupil acquisition of reading skills and reinforced that emphasis by careful and frequent evaluation of pupil progress."

Another study, conducted in 1976, compared two groups of California elementary schools that differed only on measures of student achievement. In comparison to teachers in the lower-achieving schools, teachers in the higher-achieving schools reported significantly greater amounts of principal support, were more task oriented in their classroom approach, "exhibited more evidence of applying appropriate principles of learning," and were more satisfied with their work.

The most tangible and indispensable characteristics of effective schools, Edmonds concludes, are strong administrative leadership, a "climate of expectation in which no children are permitted to fall below minimum but efficacious levels of achievement," an emphasis on the acquisition of basic school skills, flexibility in the assignment of resources to meet fundamental objectives, and a school atmosphere that is relatively orderly and quiet.

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6 **Klitgaard, Robert E., and Hall, George.** *Are There Unusually Effective Schools?* Santa Monica, California: The Rand Corporation, 1973. 37 pages. ED 085 402.

Beginning with the 1966 Coleman report, large-scale statistical studies have failed to find significant relationships between what goes on in schools and student achievement. These distressing results, say Klitgaard and Hall, are "perhaps the most counter-intuitive findings in public policy research in the past decade."

These authors propose an alternative view of the data on school effectiveness, which, instead of considering the *average* effects of school policies, asks whether exceptional or outstanding schools really do exist. The question, as the authors put it, is this: "Do some schools consistently produce outstanding students even after allowance is made for the different initial endowments of their students and for chance variation?" As long as the number of such schools is not large, they state, the mathematics of previous studies allow for such a possibility.

The authors reanalyzed several data bases from studies on Michigan, New York City, and "Project Talent" schools. They controlled only for "non-school background variables" such as SES and implicitly assumed that what was left over represented the influence of school factors and random variation.

Data from the Project Talent and New York City schools showed little evidence of consistent overachievers. The Michigan data, however, provided some evidence of unusually effective schools. For example, of 213 nonrural schools that reported scores for "four grade-year-test combinations, 72 were at least one standard deviation above the mean all four times," whereas only 13 would be expected by chance. These 72 schools showed significant differences from the average on three school-related factors. Classes were smaller, more teachers had five or more years of experience, and more teachers earned $11,000 or more.

7 **Lipham, James M.** *Effective Principal, Effective School.* Reston, Virginia: National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1981. 35 pages. ED number not yet assigned.

In the late sixties and early seventies, many studies were conducted that found home and family variables to be much more strongly related to student performance than such school-based factors as teacher preparation, instructional materials, physical plant, or dollars spent. Today, however, states Lipham, many researchers are concentrating on "the examination of specific school processes and behaviors associated with student attitude and achievement." These researchers are comparing the administrative and instructional processes of schools that have similar socioeconomic characteristics but wide differences in student achievement.

Among the many variables examined in these studies, Lipham says, "the leadership of the principal invariably has emerged as a key factor in the success of the school." In this excellent publication, Lipham summarizes a great deal of recent educational research and literature that identifies the characteristics of effective principals and effective schools.

The recent emphasis on strong leadership for effective schools "may insinuate to some a return to the 'great person' approach to leadership," says Lipham. But studies of effective schools have focused not on the great person approach but instead on the "behavior-of-the-leader-in-situation." Successful principals, it has been found, use a "situational" leadership style and vary their behavior as the situation warrants.

Numerous studies show that the principals of effective schools are committed to improving the instructional program, have a strong knowledge of classroom instructional activities, frequently participate in these activities, monitor the effective use of class time, successfully attempt to improve instructional processes, and have positive attitudes toward both teachers and students. Thus, "the single most important factor in determining the success or failure of a school," states Lipham, "is the ability of the principal to lead the staff in planning, implementing and evaluating improvements" in the school's instructional program.

Several other chapters of this publication focus on the goals, values, decision-making processes, public relations, and organizational relationships of successful schools and principals.

8 "On School Effectiveness: A Conversation with Peter Mortimore." *Educational Leadership,* 38, 8 (May 1981), pp. 642-45. EJ number not yet assigned.

"Despite the overwhelming relationships we know exist between school attainment and social class, the individual school can be effective for students of all social groups." This is the main conclusion of a five-year longitudinal study of unusually effective London high schools entitled *Fifteen Thousand Hours,* coauthored by Michael Rutter, Peter Mortimore, and others.

The "outcomes" of education measured by these researchers were attendance, behavior in school, delinquency out of school, and academic achievement. The most effective high schools, according to these measures, had teachers who showed a positive attitude toward learning, were generally more organized, emphasized rewards rather than punishments, made conditions for students as pleasant as possible, and involved students more in the management of their own learning.

Mortimore believes, however, that particular actions and methods are less important than the existence in a school of a "positive ethos," which he describes as "a positive attitude by teachers toward young people and a positive attitude toward learning." A positive ethos depends on "*leadership*—strong, positive leadership that manages to capture the enthusiasm of the teachers without being either too democratic or too autocratic." A good ethos or school climate also depends on high expectations for teacher and student performance, consistency in the treatment of students, and the giving of "realistic feedback" to students.

Changing a school's ethos from negative to positive, however, "is extraordinarily difficult," states Mortimore, "because once you set up a system everything in the school relates to it." Real change takes time and constant effort. But educators *can* make their schools more effective, Mortimore concludes, "though it will be hard work and they must expect some setbacks."

9 **Ravitch, Diane.** "The Meaning of the New Coleman Report." *Phi Delta Kappan,* 62, 10 (June 1981), pp. 718-20. EJ 245 760.

Since the publication of the original "Coleman" report in 1966, educators have been told again and again that "schools don't make a difference" and that family background factors have the preponderance of influence in determining student outcomes. "The new Coleman report dramatically reverses this pessimistic conclusion," states Ravitch, "and finds instead that schools *do* make a difference, regardless of the family background of students."

The "new" Coleman report Ravitch refers to is entitled "Public and Private Schools" (PPS) and is part of "High School and Beyond," a major longitudinal study funded by the Department of Education. Altogether, nearly sixty thousand high school students in over one thousand schools were surveyed, along with their teachers and principals.

PPS, Ravitch cautions, should be viewed from two distinct viewpoints, one political, the other educational. Even before the report was available, critics who were fearful that the study would promote tuition tax credits or educational vouchers "denounced

Coleman's methodology and even his personal integrity in their efforts to discredit his finding that private high schools are, on the whole, better than public high schools." But there is surprisingly *good* news in the report, too, if educators would pause to listen, states Ravitch.

Time and again, Ravitch states, the new report "demonstrates that achievement follows from specific school policies, not from the particular family background of the students." Private high schools produce better results, according to PPS, not because they are private but because they "create higher rates of engagement in academic activities," have better attendance, and have students who do more homework and take more rigorous subjects. These findings, Ravitch concludes, contain clear implications for the improvement of both public and private schools and "should be a source of rejoicing for educators in public and private schools alike, for they confirm the importance and efficacy of their actions."

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10 **Scott, Ralph, and Walberg, Herbert J.** "Schools Alone Are Insufficient: A Response to Edmonds." *Educational Leadership*, 37, 1 (October 1979), pp. 24-27. EJ 208 052.

Recent research has identified three sets of factors that are strongly and consistently related to student learning: student ability and motivation, quantity and quality of instruction, and the qualities of the home environment. These three sets of factors—the student, the school, and the home—"are like a three-legged stool," state Scott and Walberg. The stool is only as strong as its weakest leg, so "strengthening the stronger legs is far less productive than strengthening the weakest."

Strengthening the strongest leg—the school—is what Ronald Edmonds and other researchers would like to do, Scott and Walberg contend. In this article, they criticize this viewpoint as well as the research methodologies used and conclusions drawn by Edmonds in three of his publications.

Some of Edmonds's results coincide with the conclusions of a comprehensive review of the research literature on the determinants of academic learning, conducted by Walberg and two colleagues. Scott and Walberg are skeptical, however, of the conclusions drawn by Edmonds that do not agree with this review "since the evidence he assembles is highly limited even in his two lengthy papers." Moreover, even Edmonds's own data demonstrate the important influence of background factors on school achievement.

Edmonds asserts that an overemphasis on home influence would "not only absolve educators of their responsibility to be instructionally effective, but [would] place unfairly the burden for learning on parents," according to Scott and Walberg. But emphasizing the role of the home in learning should not reduce appreciation of the role of the school, these authors state.

After further criticizing Edmonds's methodologies and arguments, the authors conclude that "educators alone are insufficient to increase learning productivity dramatically, and they need the cooperation of parents and students themselves."

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11 **Squires, David A.** *Characteristics of Effective Schools: The Importance of School Processes.* Philadelphia: Research for Better Schools, 1980. 44 pages. ED 197 486.

Research on the effectiveness of classroom teaching techniques is abundant, but studies of the influence of the school as a whole on student outcomes are few in number. "Yet, what research there is," states Squires, "indicates that a school's processes, norms and values as a social institution do make a significant difference." Squires here reviews the best of the school effectiveness studies and derives from them numerous questions that, "when answered, identify areas where schools are effective and/or where they could improve."

The "input-output" studies of the sixties attempted to determine which "inputs"—such as socioeconomic status (SES), availability of instructional materials, staff's education and experience, dollars spent, and so on—correlated with such "outputs" as grades, achievement test scores, dropout rates, and so forth. The general conclusion of these studies was that "the most easily measured characteristics of school context, with the exception of SES and student attitudes, are not associated with student outcomes."

But what in the school environment, Squires asks, influences student attitudes? Several recent studies—including a five-year longitudinal study of London schools—support the notion that the norms and values of a school, along with certain characteristics of schools as social institutions, influence both student attitudes and outcomes.

Specifically, such factors as academic emphasis, teacher skills, teacher actions in lessons, system of rewards and punishment, pupil conditions, responsibility and participation of students, and staff organization were found to be significantly related to student outcomes. Squires concludes by synthesizing a "model of school processes" from the research he reviews.

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